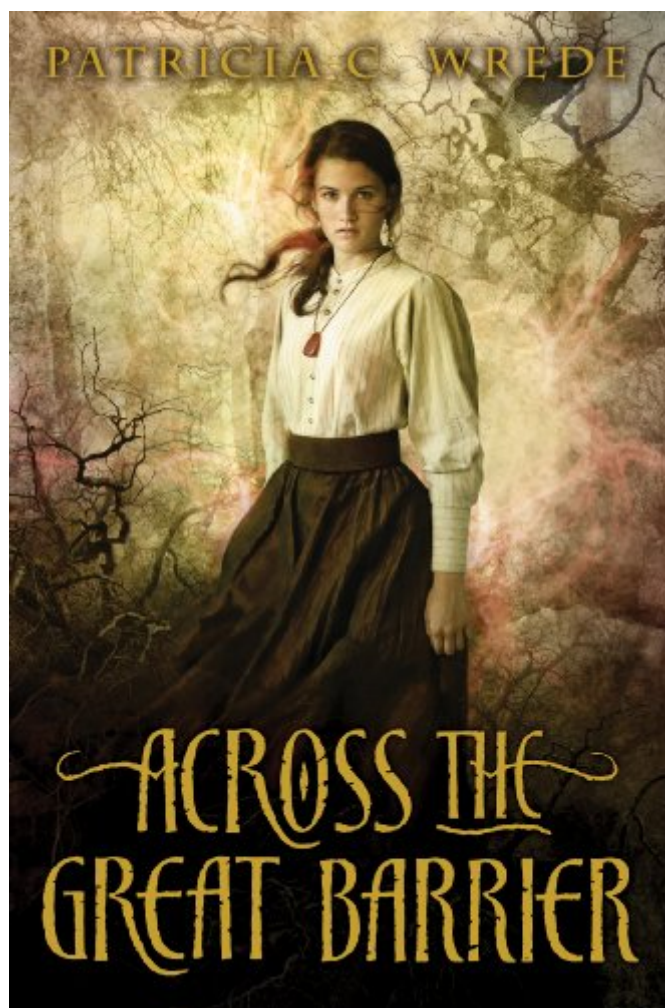


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Across The Great Barrier (Frontier Magic Book 2)



Synopsis

From New York Times #1 bestselling author Patricia C. Wrede, the second in the series of magic on the western frontier. Eff is riding west, away from the safety of the frontier city she's always known.... Eff could be a powerful magician if she wanted to. Except she's not sure she wants that kind of responsibility. Everyone keeps waiting for her to do something amazing--or to fail in a spectacular way. Worse, her twin brother, Lan, a powerful double seventh son, is jealous of all the attention she's been getting. Even as Eff protests that she's just an ordinary girl, she's asked to travel past the Barrier Spell with one of the new professors at her father's school. The land west of the Barrier is full of dangers, both magical and wild. Eff will need to use all her strength--magical and otherwise--to come safely back home. With wit, magic, and a touch of good pioneer sense, Patricia C. Wrede once again weaves a fantastic tale of the very wild west.

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Customer Reviews

"Across the Great Barrier" is the second entry in Patricia Wrede's 'Frontier Magic' trilogy of an

alternate colonial America, where there is magic aplenty on the frontier just west of the Mammoth (Mississippi) River. There are also large mammals that in our 'real' time-line died out at the end of the Pleistocene 10,000 years ago, e.g. Woolly Mammoths and Sabertooth Tigers. These critters compete with the human settlers for their crops and sometimes their lives, but they also have to contend with magical animals. There's one particularly nasty entity called a 'steam dragon' that could eat a horse and rider for breakfast and then polish off a farmer's dairy herd for lunch. In "Thirteenth Child," the first book in this series, we watched Eff Rothmer, the thirteenth child of a Professor of Magic grow from age five to eighteen and slowly come to grips with her own magical talent. Her twin brother, Lan is the fourteenth child and also the seventh son of a seventh son. Everyone expects great magic from Lan, and he is sent off to one of the great Eastern colleges of magic to further his talent. Meanwhile Eff graduates from school and goes to work tending the partially magical menagerie of the new land-grant college where her father holds his professorship. Eff is still struggling to do the simplest spells with her European-style (Avrupan) magic, when Professor Torgeson invites her on an expedition beyond the Great Barrier that runs down the middle of the Mammoth River, to catalog the plants and animals (magical and non-magical) around the new farming settlements. Naturally, Eff jumps at the chance, especially since her favorite circuit rider, Wash Morris will be their guide. It is a fascinating journey, marked by episodes of sheer terror and a puzzling find of small, perfectly-formed stone statues. Then her twin brother Lan is horribly injured when a classroom demonstration goes wrong, and Eff and her parents set off for Philadelphia to see if they can help him. This book ends with the discovery of yet another magical monstrosity that the magical twins must pit themselves against, and I've already ordered volume 3 of this intriguing series. I think it is some of Patricia Wrede's best work.

I really loved "Thirteenth Child"- but I think I like this book more. Eff has grown up a lot- she's now in her late teens through 20- and she's coming into her own self and perspective. She is far less wracked with the self-doubt she showed in the earlier book, and is even more determined to find her own way through the complications of family and work, along with discovering what path she really wants to follow for herself. She also has an insight into her techniques of doing magic that makes her a stronger and more subtle user. Eff is a wonderful protagonist. she's strong, brave, responsible, and sensible, without being at all snarky or stuffy. Her independent-mindedness grates on some members of her family, to their mutual annoyance, but she handles it generally with tact, though she does not lack a temper. I must say, I very much enjoyed reading about a heroine who is finding and making her own path, but without being a snarky rebel (fun though they can be at times!). I love the

world, too. It's definitely alternative! Not just because of the magic, but the history has similarities and differences, as does even the language. The magic makes intuitive sense, as do the 3 different main schools of addressing it (Though only 2 are described in much detail here, the third causes a major plot point). I liked this book so much that I began on the third in the series immediately after finishing it- and I seldom do that! Definitely recommended, but start with #1. Keep in mind, though, that as Eff matures she becomes a lot more interesting.

Considering how much I love the author and the first book in this trilogy, it's no surprise I enjoyed following Eff west and the discoveries made about the land and themselves. It's great to see Eff and Lan grow and learn not only about the West but about themselves. This and the prior book could fall into the coming of age stories, but are enjoyable for the new take on historical novel-giving a fantastical element to the late 1880s and the movement of settlers west. To me, as an academic, the great part is the view of westward exploration from a field biologist-collecting samples, understanding that one must have long term study and observation in order to understand the natural world, how then they can understand changes once they have established a "normal" baseline and the awe and appreciation for the magical and nonmagical creatures that inhabit the Western US. If you liked the first book, I do recommend continuing to follow the journey, for it's a good read, holds your attention, and is a good relaxing exploration into cultural American history.

This series reminds me a bit of Lois McMaster Bujold's Sharing Knife series. A young heroine in a

I absolutely love this series. What I like about them especially is that they're totally different from the standard young adult magic book. The winding narrative and voice of the heroine harkens strongly to a Mark Twain, fitting considering the time period the books are supposed to be set in. While the books are loosely connected to each other, each is really a separate story, and Eff is just a regular magician, not some child of promise upon whom the weight of the world stands. It's refreshing to have a series of magic, fantasy stories that don't work off of the same formulaic premise. As to this addition to the series, if it's possible, I actually like *Across the Great Barrier* better than the first, which is atypical to most fantasy series. I like that the story doesn't focus on one single issue, but meanders around, similar to how regular life would go. Eff is a lovable character who you root for, and she always feels very tangible, making decisions that seem in character, and someone who comes across as a very real person. Lindsey Miller, Lindsey's Library

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